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Abstract: This article addresses the generational transmission of the decisive Eritrean past and illustrates its influence on the reinforcement and maintenance of Eritrean identity and sense of belonging to Eritrea on young Eritreans grown up in the diaspora. It argues that the transmission and preservation of narratives and knowledge about the decisive Eritrean past makes the Eritrean history a "chosen trauma", which constitutes an important aspect of the formation of a collective identity. Thereby, the article focuses on two particular modes of transmissions: first, within families from parents to children and second, by the international conferences of the YPFDJ, the exile youth branch of the country's ruling People's Front for Democracy and Justice PFDJ. The generational transmission of a decisive past helps to understand the formation of identity and belonging of second-generation Eritreans and further contributes to the broader debate on post-migrant generations constituting belonging in a transnational field.

Keywords: Belonging; diaspora; Eritrea; second generation; identity, chosen trauma

1 Introduction

In the last years, a vast amount of studies has emerged that describe how individuals living in transnational contexts establish and maintain relations across national boundaries. A majority of these studies has been addressing the transnational lives of actual migrants, while research on transnationalism in terms of their children, the so-called second generation, has been widely neglected (King and Christou 2011, 452). Furthermore, scholars then are rather divided when it comes to the debate about transnationalism of the second generation (see Levitt and Waters 2002). Irrespective of the actual transnational engagement of the second generation, children of migrants are often raised and socialized in transnational settings involving various cross-border networks and thus relate to more than one country (Levitt 2009, 1231). As a result, descendants of immigrants find themselves faced by questions of who they are and

where they belong. Besides, the ambiguous term 'second generation' itself already indicates that growing up to immigrant parents may affect the constitution of belonging. It involves the implicit assumption of being native to another place of origin and thus ascribes a certain belonging to the individuals (Toivanen 2014, 23). Then, the process of developing their sense of self is influenced by their manifold personal, organisational, institutional or economical connections as well as by political projects relating to race, ethnicity, and nation (Fouron and Glick Schiller 2002, 171/194).

In the context of Eritrea, several studies on identity formation of young diaspora Eritreans reveal how second-generation Eritreans constitute and maintain their Eritrean national identity in the transnational field (Arnone 2010; Conrad 2010; Nolting von 2002; Tecle 2012; Zerat 2009). Thereby, scholars point to the crucial role of parents in shaping their children's identity by teaching them Eritrean values and Eritrean culture and socializing them accordingly (Conrad 2006, 7; Zerat 2009, 67). Although mentioned, the Eritrean history as well as its effects on the second-generation Eritreans' identity and their sense of belonging, however is hardly referred to. The aim of this paper is to draw specific attention on the cross-generational transmission of the Eritrean decisive past and to reveal its influence on the promotion and preservation of national consciousness, identity and belonging within the diaspora youth. It points out two specific ways, through which this may take place: First, the role of parents and second, the annual international conferences of the Young People's Front for Democracy and Justice YPFDJ, which is the exile youth branch of the Eritrean People's Front for Democracy and Justice PFDJ. Applying the concept of chosen trauma enables the consideration of the decisive Eritrean past and its influence on second-generation Eritreans' negotiation of identity and belonging. This has received only little attention in recent studies despite it appears to be particularly crucial in the Eritrean case. The paper thus focuses on the process of the transmission of the decisive Eritrean past as a means of maintaining Eritrean identity rather than its actual outcome since the effects vary individually. By shedding light on the transmission of the decisive Eritrean past onto the second-generation Eritreans, this paper reveals the importance of decisive pasts of ancestral home countries to post-migrant generations regarding their negotiation of identity and belonging towards their origins. Thereby, the article contributes to the broader debate on second generation individuals constituting belonging in a transnational field.

With the focus on generational transmission, this paper conveys an image of sense of belonging of the second generation as being some kind of top-down process. However, second-generation Eritreans are not just passive individuals lacking the capacity to negotiate belonging by themselves. They also actively engage in constructing and shaping their identity and their sense of belonging (see Conrad 2010; Tecle 2012). Furthermore, the formation of identity and belonging involves a vast range of influencing factors. The article thus addresses just one particular aspect that, however, plays an important part in contributing to understand the formation of identity and belonging of second-generation Eritreans.

2 Methodology

I gathered the empirical material by using different methods. From end of 2013 to mid-2015 I conducted semi-structured interviews with ten female and six male Eritreans, born and/or grown up and undergone the major part of their socialization in the diaspora. Due to the overall focus of this research project, all of the interviewed second-generation Eritreans[1] currently are living in Switzerland. In order to select 'information-rich' interview participants, I adopted a purposeful sampling strategy (Patton 1990, 169-186). In terms of the YPFDJ respectively its conferences, interviewees consist of both individuals with personal experiences as well as of individuals, to whom the YPFDJ does not mean anything. In addition to interviews, I accompanied a group of second-generation Eritreans travelling to Eritrea in 2014. Thereby, I was able to experience conversations and discussions amongst second-generation Eritreans. These provided further insights about both the overall research topic and the question concerned in this paper. Additionally, an expert interview (Bogner and Menz 2009, 46-53) with the honorary consul of Eritrea in Switzerland in 2014, who has in-depth knowledge about Eritrea and its diaspora due to his long-standing relationship with the country, served as a further source of information. Finally, another data source constitute documents of the 10th annual Euro YPFDJ conference hold in Switzerland in 2014. Besides a document that reads as a kind of

[1] The term second generation labels children of immigrants, who are born in the diaspora, while other categories were introduced for those who are born in their parents' home country but raised abroad (Andall 2002, 391). Several interviewees have left the country only during their early childhood. Nevertheless, since all but one migrated before the age of 12 and therefore underwent their primary socialization in the diaspora (Aparicio 2007, 1170), I will refer to them as second-generation Eritrean.

conference program, I was able to see different documents of presentation or seminaries of the conference.

However, in the course of my data collection I realized that many second-generation Eritreans did not want to participate in the study. An Eritrean man, whom I approached with the request for helping me to find eligible study participants, replied:

> 'I am still trying to find people who consent to be interviewed. But to tell you the truth, it proves very difficult. Because people are sceptical and reluctant.' (Statement of an Eritrean parent, 2014)

In the event of real or perceived contradictions or inconsistencies between individuals or groups, people are rather suspicious of outsiders and thus may not be willing to talk to them (Cohen and Arieli 2011, 424-425). In terms of the Eritrean diaspora, the fragmentation based on divergent political opinions creates such a climate of mutual distrust and mistrust of unknown outsiders (Glatthard 2012, 21; Conrad 2010, 14). In the present case, those who describe themselves as apolitical as well as individuals participating in the YPFDJ and therefore are understood to have a government-friendly attitude seemed to be especially restrained and were difficult to access. It proved often impossible to even take up contact. Therefore, I can only speculate about their reasons for not participating. On the basis of my field experiences, however, possible motives might be the perceived omnipresence of politics in discussions about Eritrea or the individuals' perception that international reports and studies portray only critical, negative or undifferentiated pictures of Eritrea. As a result of this limitation, online platforms constitute a further important data source. Besides the homepages 'dehay.com', 'shaebia.org' and 'meadna.com', from which I will cite below, webpages such as 'tesfanews.net', 'awate.com' or also YouTube clips have provided insights about the YPFDJ conferences and revealed personal experiences of conference participants. YPFDJ websites were not available to access, and the YPFDJ currently seems to be chiefly active via social media platforms. These, however, revealed rather irrelevant content in terms of this article's topic and thus were of less relevance to this study. The combination of these different data sources and methods ensured to gain a broader picture of the research topic.

All interviews except one were conducted in German and have been translated to English as accurately as possible by myself. In order to protect the privacy of study participants, I replaced the participants' names with pseudonyms. To ensure their

anonymity, I further do not provide more details, as this could make participants easier to identify.

3 Analytical Frame: Politics of belonging and the chosen trauma

Questions about identity and belonging present central issues for people with migration background and much research in the field of migration, diaspora, transnationalism and youth addresses this topic (see Anthias 2009; Fouron and Glick Schiller 2002). Nevertheless, the two concepts are both overused and under-theorized. Belonging and (collective) identities are often used, confusingly, interchangeably (as was just done above) and thereby seem to be put often on a same level. Further, they are not mutually exclusive but rather interrelated and overlap (Anthias 2006, 19-22 ; Pfaff-Czarnecka and Toffin 2011, xv-xviii). In simplified terms, both concepts deal with questions about the self and who we are as a person, about inclusion and exclusion and about processes of contructing boundaries and hierarchies. Nonetheless, the two concepts certainly cannot be completely equated:

> 'Identities are narratives, stories people tell themselves and others about who they are (and who they are not). Not all of these stories are about belonging to particular groupings and collectivities; they can be, for instance, about individual attributes, body images, vocational aspirations or sexual prowess.' (Yuval-Davis 2006, 202)

Further, one may belong to a collective without fully identify with it or one may identify with a group without fully belong to it (Anthias 2009, 9-10). Pfaff-Czarnecka & Toffin then argue that belonging includes more aspects than collective identity that rather narrows down the complex process of constructing shared characteristics (Pfaff-Czarnecka & Toffin 2011, xvi). Drawing upon this, I understand belonging as encompassing identity and treat identity and collective identity – collective here mainly refers to nationality and/or culture – as an integral part of belonging. In order to study the mechanisms of promoting and maintaining a sense of national identity and belonging to Eritrea amongst the diaspora Eritrean youths, I adopt an analytical frame linking debates on belonging and the politics of belonging with the nation respectively nationalism and the concept of chosen trauma. But what exactly is belonging and how does it come into being?

Belonging is a dynamic process, in which people negotiate their relationships to a range of different subjects and objects. It comprises the connection and ties to 'other people, places or modes of being, and the ways in which individuals and groups are caught within wanting to belong, wanting to become, a process that is fuelled by learning rather than the positing of identity as a stable state' (Probyn 1996, 19). This process can be both an act of self-attribution or identification and an act of ascription being assigned by others. Yuval-Davis then identifies three analytical levels: First, the *social location* of individuals that constitutes the set of characteristics involving a range categories such as gender, class or age group determining one's place within the society. Second, the *individual's identifications and emotional attachments* to various collectives established through the reproduction of narratives and stories about one's identity. Such narrations may relate to the past, the present or the future and are forwarded and reproduced from one generation to the other. And third, the *ethical and political value system* that is about the judgement of own and other's attachments and belongings (Yuval-Davis 2006, 199-204; Yuval-Davis 2011, 89-94). Thus, belonging 'involves affectual or emotional aspects; feeling "at home", memories, ties and so on. It also involves sharing core moral values, which are not necessarily culturally specific ones; not all moral values signal belonging in a cultural community' (Anthias 2009, 10). One particular frame of reference is the nation, even if it presents 'an imagined political community (…) because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members' (Anderson 2006[1983], 6). In regards of national identity and belonging to a nation, a belief in commonality arises out of a shared culture and traditions and basic common ideologies, understandings, opinions and ideas linking people to a certain homeland (Smith 1991, 10-11). Further, Volkan depicts that for nations, as for practically every large group, a "chosen trauma" is another important aspect that form people's collective identity.

> 'The "chosen trauma" is one component of this [large-group] identity. The term "chosen trauma" refers to the shared mental representation of a massive trauma that the group's ancestors suffered at the hand of an enemy.' (Volkan 2001, 79)

A chosen trauma originates from a decisive past event or moment linked to a conflict with another large group. Through the mental representation of the actual event and

the ‘transgenerational transmissions’ from those who experienced it first-hand to subsequent generations, the event then becomes a chosen trauma. These representations are characterized and influenced by narratives of victimhood, heroism, or both together. As the decisive event passes on to future generations, historical reality or truth becomes less important and it becomes a mythologized narrative (see Volkan 2001; 2004). In terms of belonging to a nation, the chosen trauma respectively a decisive past event influences individuals’ identifications and emotional attachments to the collective, links them together and thus presents an important aspect of their sense of belonging to the nation.

The process of maintaining boundaries of belonging and differentiating between *we* and *the others* is referred to as the politics of belonging. It ‘comprises specific political projects aimed at constructing belonging in particular ways to particular collectives that are, at the same time, themselves being constructed by these projects in very particular ways’ (Yuval-Davis 2006, 197). These political projects focus on the discursive construction and reproduction of boundaries of belonging, which determine, maintain and justify inclusion and exclusion (Anthias 2013, 6-7; Yuval-Davis 2011, 18-21). This includes a formal aspect such as legal membership defined by rules, rights and duties as well as a more informal aspects relating to everyday experiences of membership and ‘the emotions such memberships evoke’ (Yuval-Davis et al. 2005, 526).

Politics of belonging and the political projects are of considerable relevance to migrants and their descendant. On the one hand, they have to negotiate their relation and their belonging to the resident society, the nation and the country in which they are living. On the other hand they simultaneously are claiming and defining their affiliations and belonging to the nation and the nation-state from which they or their ancestors originate (Brubaker 2010, 66; Yuval-Davis 2011, 81-112). Concerning politics of belonging of diaspora individuals and their homeland relation, ‘long-distant nationalism’ (Anderson 1992) is an important aspect, or indeed a political project, which strengthens the feeling of belonging to the distant home. I argue that the transmission of a decisive past event may constitute an important element of (long-distance) nationalist political project of belonging. A nationalist political project may reflect specifically upon such events and use them as a base for nationalist tendencies. Although the generational transmission of a decisive past event is a rather unconscious process (Volkan 2004, 48), it also may be actively promoted. Particularly

leaders seem 'to know how to reactivate a chosen trauma, especially when their large group is in conflict or has gone through a drastic change and needs to reconfirm or enhance its identity' (Volkan 2001, 88). Thus, calling to mind a decisive past event presents a powerful tool of politics of belonging since it serves as a strategy to sustain and reinforce boundaries of belonging separating *us* from *them* and thereby promotes sense of belonging to a collective.

4 Eritrea and its decisive past

The creation of modern nation-states often has involved violent confrontations. Thus, the struggle for nationhood and the creation of a nation-state may present a "chosen trauma" that constitutes, alongside with other aspects, a crucial feature of national identity (Volkan 2004, 27). It is not the objective of this paper to provide a detailed overview on the Eritrean struggle for nationhood by repeating the exiting literature (see Connell 1997; Hepner 2009; Iyob 1995), but to illustrate how the Eritrean history consists of decisive past events that are important for the Eritrean national identity.

Eritrea has witnessed a 'history of pain' (Arnone 2010, 86) that makes it difficult to refer to one specific decisive moment. In fact, there are multiple decisive past events with regards to Eritrea's nation-building process (see Dorman 2005; Reid 2005) that constitute, in their entirety, a "chosen trauma". As Reid's field note illustrates, these span the time from the colonial era, the Ethiopian federation and annexation, the struggle for independence, to more recent political developments such as the UN sanctions:

> 'The rubber dragons [at the Independence day celebrations] are particularly important, as they represent all of Eritrea's bogeymen, its enemies real and imagined, historic and current, from evil colonialism, to the faceless uncaring "international community", to treacherous internal opponents.' (Reid 2005, 479)

Following the end of the colonial area, the international community has federated Eritrea with Ethiopia in 1952 and also did not intervene against the illegal Ethiopian annexation ten years later. From the perspective of Eritrea, the great powers not only have ignored its desire for independence. Furthermore, they have done nothing to prevent the unlawful annexation. Rather they pursued their own interests, most notably the United States that maintained good relations with Ethiopia (Connell 1997,

19-26; Conrad 2010, 28-35; Iyob 1995, 61-97; Sorenson 1991, 303-307). This also applies to the 30-year struggle for independence between 1961 and 1991.

> 'During the struggle, the EPLF [Eritrean People's Liberation Front] did not receive support from the Eastern Bloc, which sided with the Marxist Ethiopian Dergue regime, or from Western governments due to its ideological orientation. This led to the emergence of two structural characteristics of the Eritrean regime: the insistence of self-reliance coupled with a deep mistrust towards the international community (including foreign donors) and the instrumentalization of the diaspora as a funding resource.' (Hirt 2013, 6)

For Eritreans who lived through this time whether in Eritrea or in exile, the Eritrean independence struggle and the experienced violence constitutes a 'national trauma' (Bernal 2017, 6). A further decisive past event is linked to emerging territorial conflicts around the village of Badme entailing the violent 1998-2000 Ethiopian-Eritrean boarder war. Although major Western governments were guarantors of the peace agreement involving the demarcation of the boundary, they failed to push the implementation through as Ethiopia refused to adhere to the demarcation decision. From an Eritrean perspective, the monitoring governments, above all the United States, omitted to exercise pressure on Ethiopia because they did not want to risk the good relations with their chosen regional ally Ethiopia (Hirt 2013, 7; Gray 2006). A more recent decisive event is the imposition of sanctions by the UN in 2009. The Eritrean government, which 'called the sanctions "illegal and unjust" (…) claimed that the United States was the mastermind behind the resolution' (Hirt 2013, 18-19).

Hence, Eritrea's history is characterized by multiple challenges and a continuous struggle for self-determination against external powers and the international community interfering in the country's political destiny, which presents an important element of today's Eritrean national identity (Arnone 2010, 85; Dorman 2005, 207-209; Sorenson 1991, 308-309). Thereby, heroic stories of the small Eritrean rebel movement defeating the oversized Ethiopian ruler 'against all odds' (Connell, 1997) as well as narratives of being neglected, overlooked or victimized are central.

> 'The government has been successful in developing a narrative in which Eritrea is portrayed as a heroic nation struggling against the rest of the world in order to achieve independence and self-reliance, a fact which,

> according to the government's narrative, has triggered an international conspiracy in order to weaken the young nation.' (Hirt 2015a: 25)

Thus, both narratives of heroism and victimhood of decisive past events are important elements. These narratives and myths as well as their reinterpretation were strongly linked to Eritrea's nation-building process (Nolting von 2002, 76-77), and so contribute to construct and maintain boundaries of belonging. In the past century, the power of interpretation of the meaning of these events for Eritrean national identity mainly has been with the Eritrean leadership (Conrad 2010, 215). Since 2001, however, alternative notions of Eritrean nationalism and the national narratives have emerged and debated amongst the Eritrean community (Bernal 2014, 3; Dorman 2005, 218). Yet, the Eritrean decisive past, as pictured here, still presents a conventional and widespread narrative of Eritrean nationalism advanced by the contemporary leadership.

Today's Eritrean youth, however, lacks of concrete experiences of these decisive past events. Hence, the chronicle of the Eritrean struggle for self-determination, on which Eritrean nation-state and Eritrean nationalism bases, seems to be threatened to fall into oblivion (Müller 2012, 796). Thus, tales about Eritrea's past constitute an important means, through which the national narrative may be passed on to the next generation. Conrad reveals that such 'stories about Eritrean heroism as well as the wrongdoings the Eritrean has suffered yet not succumbed to' (Conrad 2006, 6) are particularly important to those born and/or raised in the diaspora in order to form their relationship to the ancestral origin. In the following, I will reveal two specific ways through which the Eritrean decisive past transmits to the diaspora youth.

4.1 Transmission of the decisive past and the role of parents

> 'People in my age [second-generation Eritreans] often are conditioned by their parents to develop a national pride as if they used to live there. As if they had witnessed it all by themselves. As if they have been to war and so on. But, we simply were not. We have been growing up *here*. And all we know, we know just from stories. (…). There is indeed this strong, eager Eritrean national pride that many feel. I don't know where this might originate from except from their parents. What I do not understand, though, is how this is nourished and maintained.' (Selam, interview 2014)

Parents, friends and community members are important for second-generation Eritreans as regards of what it means to be Eritrean and thus the formation of Eritrean identity (Zerat 2009, 67). Alike, interviews revealed that the earliest and probably most prominent transmission of Eritrean identity shaping the second-generation Eritreans' sense of belonging to Eritrea took place within the family circles. Most participants mentioned that it was their parents, through whom they learned about Eritrea and who educated them as Eritreans.

> 'I was raised Eritrean. My parents are from Eritrea and not from Europe. So, they could not help but raising me as an Eritrean.' (Kisanet, interview 2014)

Conrad points out that Eritrean parents even try to teach and impart their children Eritrean values and the Eritrean genealogy (Conrad 2006, 7). Almost all participants agreed that it was a particular concern of their parents that they picked up an Eritrean language, mostly Tigrinya. Further, the parents often maintained contacts to other diaspora members. Through such interactions or participating in Eritrean national or religious celebrations in the community, the second-generation Eritreans experienced Eritrean traditions or habits and thus learned about Eritrean identity. Despite Yohanna described that she did not conceive it as a deliberate act of passing on the Eritrean identity and nationalism by her parents, she stressed that this may be true for many others:

> 'It was more a celebration thing and less identity and nationalism and things like that. Maybe my parents wanted it that way as well. I never actually asked them. But it's true that it was very rare to have children that didn't go to classes, to Eritrean classes. Because usually they [parents] subscribed them to some school where you could learn [an Eritrean] language, where you could write and read.' (Yohanna, interview 2014)

Alike, Idris mentioned that the actual engagement of parents in transmitting Eritrean identity to their children turns out very differently (Idris, interview 2014). Few participants even mentioned that their parents did not put effort in the perpetuation of the Eritrea identity. One interviewee stressed that her parents rather place emphasis on her integration in the host society than educate her Eritrean, while Semhar stated that her father even tried to prevent her from having contact with other Eritreans and also refused to talk in Tigrinya to her (Semhar, interview 2014). However, in general,

participants stressed that it seemed to be important to their parents that they would adopt some basic Eritrean characteristics and knowledge about Eritrea and its culture and at least know where they originally come from.

Besides learning about culture and traditions, interviews revealed that knowing about the country's history presents an important aspect of the transmission of the Eritrean identity and a sense of belonging.

> To people who have asked [Tarik] about his origin, he always would have replied 'Eritrea' and then explained, full of pride, that this is a small country in East Africa. He would have a special connection to Eritrea, he stated, due to all the stories his parents have told him. And they further have promoted this by enrolling him to the Tigrinya school. As long as he was a youngster, his parents would have been doing their utmost that he did not lose his Eritrean culture. (Tarik, interview notes 2014)

Narrations about Eritrea and personal family histories told by parents serve as an important means to convey a certain image of Eritrea and help shape the second-generation Eritreans' formation of an Eritrean identity. As Conrad highlights, these may be 'influenced by the political indoctrination of the EPLF mass organisation' (Conrad 2006, 7). Shaped by the EPLF's ideology or not, interviews showed that these narrations and the experiences or memories of the study participants often involve stories about the Eritrean struggle.

> 'My father was very active within the diaspora and I have learned much about Eritrea from him. At the weekends, he was at sessions and meetings. He also has organized community events here in Switzerland. And he always told me about Bologna [the annually Eritrean Festival in Bologna before Eritrea's independence] and how they have also been collaborating with the Italian government. And they also used to have movies.
> Sunday was always the family day. You normally invite other people over and celebrate the traditional coffee ceremony. You just sit together and talk while the TV is on and you watch Eritrean broadcast. Well, by then, there was no EriTV so you had to watch videos. About the protests and so. And like that we [the children] have also learned about it. Then, when the war broke out and my uncles went to war, my parents consistently called home and always watched TV. And when the border agreement has been made, my father got up at 2 o'clock at night to watch the decision. I remember having told him to wake me up, too.
> I also went to demonstrations with him. Yes, he surely has influenced me regarding politics. My parents also included us children in discussions. In this way, I started to gain interest. Of course, I still was young, about nine years old. But now I am active myself and became a member of the

> YPFDJ. I guess without my parents' support and engagement things never would have turned out this way.' (Amanuel, interview 2014)

This quote illustrates that childhood experiences and memories constitute an important element, through which the decisive past transmits to the next generation and the "chosen trauma" may materialize. Alike Amanuel, different interviewees remembered how their parents regularly have informed themselves about the situation in Eritrea and were engaging with homeland politics. In order to receive some news, they used to listen to the radio or watched war reporting and documentations about the Eritrean struggle for independence. Even Semhar, whose father tried to keep her away from anything related to Eritrea, remembered these war broadcasts, which were absolutely not suitable for children (Semhar, interview 2014). Thus, the mentioned videos and broadcast appear as an important means, though which the second-generation Eritreans learned about the decisive past of their ancestral origin. In addition, personal stories about the struggle for independence and narration about war experiences learn have similar effects.

> 'Talking of myself, it is true that I somehow forgot about it [Eritrea's history and the struggle for independence]. When I was a young boy… From parents, you often heard things such as "those people are such-and-such people" or "well, the Ethiopians, we're at war with them, they are bad". And like that they produced a bad image about others, you know. (…) Earlier I then believed that these people were bad only because they told me so.' (Dawit, interview 2014)

Various interviewees mentioned that their parents told them about the struggle for independence, about how their relatives went to war and how they have witnessed traumatic war experiences. Despite it seem to be less common to talk about personal losses (see Bernal 2017), several interviewees also told stories involving the loss of family members. Besides imparting knowledge about the decisive Eritrean past, such personal tales further may create empathy and understanding for the Eritrean struggle among second-generation Eritreans.

In the opening quote, Selam wondered about the mechanism of the perpetuation of the national pride amongst the second generation. Interviews revealed that narrations about the Eritrean history but also the parent's engagement with Eritrea, which second-generation Eritreans have been witnessing during their childhood, play a crucial role. Thus, parents transmit narratives of the decisive

Eritrean past both deliberately and unconsciously to the succeeding generation. As the examples of Amanuel or Dawit showed they thereby directly influence their children's minds. Furthermore, the manner in which some interviewees recalled stories about the struggle for independence revealed that some interviewees seem to embrace the decisive past to a certain extent as a part of their own history and identity. Thereby, the personal war experiences of ancestors or parents tend to be adopted and thus affect the second-generation Eritreans identity. Yet, Dawit's statement indicates that second-generation Eritreans do not generally internalize the decisive past, as he does not unconditionally adopt these narratives anymore. However, irrespectively whether or not second-generation Eritreans endorse such stories as part of their own, interviews revealed that the decisive past constitutes a crucial element in relation to the negotiation of second-generation Eritreans' identity, as they are generally aware of it. The generational transmission makes it a "chosen trauma" and so becomes important also for the next generation.

4.2 Transmission of the decisive past and the YPFDJ conferences

As a part of its nation-building strategy, the Eritrean leadership has introduced programs to include today's Eritrean youth in the development of the nation and the nation-state (Dorman 2005, 210; Müller 2012, 796; Riggan 2016, 22). One such strategy specifically targeting on the diaspora youth presents the Young People's Front for Democracy and Justice YPFDJ. In 2004, the PFDJ created the YPFDJ at a time 'when the first group of Eritreans born and/or raised in the diaspora were entering adulthood and thus arguably becoming independent from the direct influence of their parents' (Tecle 2012, 67). Hence, Tecle argues that it may be understood as a project of the Eritrean 'transnational state' (see Tecle and Goldring 2013) aiming to institutionalize belonging and reinforce and maintain Eritrean identity amongst the diaspora youth (Tecle 2012, 66). However, before going into greater detail about the its annual international conferences, what exactly is the YPFDJ and what are its objectives?

As mentioned earlier, the YPFDJ is the exile youth branch of the People's Front for Democracy and Justice PFDJ that leads Eritrea since independence. Despite the PFDJ defines itself explicitly as a front and not a party (Bernal 2001, 153; EPLF/PFDJ 1994), it often is referred to as Eritrea's only political party that currently governs Eritrea as a one-party state (see Hepner and Tecle 2013; Müller 2012;

Schmitz-Pranghe 2010). Alike, there is no uniform understanding of the very nature of the YPFDJ as interviews revealed. Many study participants referred to specific development projects of the YPFDJ and thereby conveyed an image of some kind of (development) aid organisation. Others labelled it specifically as a youth party, while the YPFDJ describes it as a diaspora movement (YPFDJ 2014, 6). Perhaps, Amanuel's description best illustrates the general understanding of nature of the YPFDJ:

> 'When you take a closer look, it is not an aid organisation but a political organisation, which then also participates in the development of the country. Be it through projects in Eritrea or also in Switzerland.' (Amanuel, interview 2014)

The YPFDJ's purpose is to create 'and continue to create a generation of conscious, strong and capable youth who recognize their important role in promoting the proud Eritrean history, identity and culture while working together and serving their community' (YPFDJ 2014, 1). It aims to promote and preserve national identity by instilling the values, principles, visions and experiences of the past generation and the liberation movement amongst the diaspora youth and to include it in the political and economic development of Eritrea (Tecle 2012, 68-69; Weldehaimanot 2006, 12; YPFDJ 2014, 8). Thus, the YPFDJ aims to impart the PFDJ ideologies and the legacy of the struggle for independence to the diaspora youth and to integrate them into the nation-building process. Hence, it presents a political project of the PFDJ leadership that constitutes 'a hub for the reproduction of [Eritrean] nationalism' (Hirt 2015b, 12-13).

Alongside a variety of activities, the YPFDJ annual international conferences seem to be an important item on the YPFDJ's agenda. These worldwide gatherings both enable and promote the transnational networking and consolidation of young diaspora Eritreans. The conferences normally attract several hundred Eritrean attendees ranging from diaspora youth to community leaders, diplomats, embassy officials and PFDJ representatives to invited guests (Eritrean Ministry of Information, 2013). Study participants who have attended YPFDJ conferences described that the conference proceeding typically includes plenary sessions, presentations, seminaries and workshops accompanied with discussion forums and the possibility to ask questions. Further, it comprises entertaining program items such as theatrical or dance

performances. Each conference then has its specific main topic. The 10th Euro YPFDJ conference hold in Switzerland in 2014, of which I was able to view some conference documents, put special emphasis on Eritrean national identity and culture. The conference documentations indicate that the Eritrean decisive past thereby plays a vital role:

> 'Although the roots of the Eritrean identity dates [sic] back to ancient times, it is our common experience of fighting colonial powers that consolidated our national identity and the nation building process has further developed it and transferred it to a new generation of Eritreans.' (YPFDJ 2014, 17)

> 'The fact that we have maintained our unity within our diversity is not an accident but an outcome of a long struggle for a common cause. It must be stressed here that the inclusive and participatory nature of the liberation struggle transcending ethnic and religious differences has played a pivotal role in unifying various ethnic groups within differing religious affiliations for a common goal and shared values. This process has emboldened the strong sense of collective Eritrean identity culture, which we all now relate to.' (YPFDJ 2014, 15)

The referred document points out that the decisive past crucially has determined the Eritrean identity. It emphasizes that Eritrean culture and national identity are outcomes of the struggle for independence basing on the ideologies inherited from the liberation fighters. Values such as self-reliance, political independence, unity and harmony despite ethnic and religious diversity but also camaraderie or the dedication for the national cause and Eritrea's development thereby are listed as some core attributes. Further, the document reveals that the cross-generational reinforcement and preservation of the Eritrean identity according to the PFDJ national charter presents an important aim for the YPFDJ and its conference (YPFDJ 2014, 15-16). Various program items such as sessions, presentations or aspects of the broader conference framework program then seem to serve to transmit the Eritrean identity accordingly. Interview statements about personal conference experiences as well as conference impressions found online indicate that the Eritrean history thereby seems to be ever-present all topic.

> 'The theater play organized by YPFDJ Oslo was touching; vivid and brought up many memories from the last stages of the liberation struggle. Semhar Hailu played the role of a young Eritrean girl that was raised in the Diaspora and was trying to understand how it was possible for her

> father and his generation to be 'tegadelties' in 'meda' [Eritrean liberation fighters in the field or in areas of operation] with no communication with family and friends, knowing that each and everyday [sic] could be their last, having nothing but the clothes they were wearing and their Kalashnikov while fighting the world superpowers from the mountains of Sahel. She did not only want to understand it, but she wanted to know everything right away. (…). The play confirmed to me that our generation was able to pass on our history of struggle in an understandable way to the new generation.' (Participant's impressions of the 7th YPFDJ conference, Dehai 2011)

Study participants explained that entertaining actives involving various performances by conference participants such as theatre plays, reciting ancient songs or poems as well as items of the conference's framework program such as exhibitions or concerts of famous Eritrean musicians, often refer to the Eritrean past. Alike, presentations and speeches highlight the legacy of the Eritrean struggle and learn the young conference attendees about Eritrea's decisive past. Zerai for instance explained that Yemane Gebreab, the head of PFDJ and president advisor, consistently referred to Eritrea's history and to pride in his opening speech at the YPFDJ conference in Switzerland. Alike, additional conference documents revealed that specific sessions of the 2014 YPFDJ conference encompassed topics relating to Eritrean values, the collectivist nature of the Eritrean society, the influence of colonial regimes on Eritrean identity or the EPLF's contribution to the development of an Eritrean national identity. They further included parts, which encouraged participants to elaborate their understanding of Eritrean culture and identity in workshops and discussions (own notes from conference documents, 2014). By such means, the YPFDJ conferences transmit and impart knowledge about the decisive past and perpetuate the legacy of the Eritrean struggle as a base of Eritrean identity over the course of generations.

> 'We are determined to continue the legacy of the People's Front (Hizbawi Ginbar) that made Eritrea's independence a reality and to follow the footsteps of that unique generation by upholding its vision, principles and goals.' (YPFDJ 2014, 8)

In addition, informing conference attendees about the situation surrounding Eritrea presents another important subject of the YPFDJ conferences. At various conferences, Yemane Gebreab gave speeches about the current situation in Eritrea, its development trajectories and about national and international challenges since independence (see

Eritrean Ministry of Information 2016; Eritrea Profile 2014). Besides national issues, the unresolved border conflict with Ethiopia or the stance of the international community towards Eritrea thereby seem to be prominent themes (Tecle 2012, 79). Zerai who participated several YPFDJ conferences, stated that they frequently call attention to current external threats mainly referring to the United States:

> [At the conference in Switzerland], Yemane has talked about the enemies of Eritrea in his speech. About those, who are hostile towards Eritrea and intend to tear the Eritrean community apart. He would have stressed that Eritreans must hold together and make a stand against this external threat. (…). When talking about the enemy Yemane generally would have referred to the United States, which intended to divide the nation and harm Eritrea. And as soon as the conference attendees would hear "America", the audience gets loud and takes on the view that they have to defend against them.
> I asked Zerai about the reason for this assumption and he replied that it is due to the UN sanctions, which have urged and impelled by the United States. (Zerai, interview notes 2014)

The conference document then stresses that it is a duty of today's youth 'to continue the struggle … towards a prosperous, sustainable and viable nation' (YPFDJ 2014, 1). Thereby, they draw links between the past generation youths, which played a central role in the liberation struggle, and the YPFDJ. A senior speaker at the 2014 conference for instance compared the YPFDJ conference in some way with the town of Nakfa (Zerai, interview notes 2014), which served as the EPLF's headquarters during the struggle for independence that was never conquered by the Ethiopian troops and thus presents a strong symbol for Eritrea's nation-building (Conrad 2010, xi). Such direct comparisons help to maintain the state of struggle amongst the diaspora youth and ensure the generation-spanning continuance of Eritrea's "chosen trauma". Being threatened then tends to provoke the articulation and politicisation of belonging (Yuval-Davis 2006, 197). By conveying an image of the Eritrean nation still being exposed to external threats, the YPFDJ conferences thus achieve to reinforce a sense of belonging to Eritrea.

To sum up, the YPFDJ conferences impart and maintain Eritrean national identity not only by instilling the legacy of the Eritrean struggle and passing on knowledge about the decisive Eritrean past to the diaspora youth. Moreover, they convey an image of the continuance Eritrea's struggle and the preservation of the countries decisive history. Thus, the YPFDJ conferences transmit and solidify the

"chosen trauma" and thereby promote the reinforcement of an Eritrean identity and a sense of belonging to Eritrea amongst the second-generation Eritreans through the decisive Eritrean past.

However, how do conference attendees for their part talk about the conferences and perceive the transmission of the decisive past and Eritrean identity? For the participants of this study, gathering with other peers generally appears to be the central component of the conference. Their main reason to participate the conference is to meet other second-generation Eritreans to whom they feel close to since they grew up in the diaspora too and thus may have experienced similar issues. However, Zerai mentioned that the participants of the YPFDJ conference in Switzerland only comprised of roughly one third young Eritreans grown up in the diaspora, while the rest were older Eritreans in their mid-thirties or above or Eritreans of the more recent immigration generation (Zerai, interview notes 2014). Statements of conference participants published online then reveal general satisfaction with the conference as participants have learned a lot about Eritrea or how they may contribute to Eritrea's development, which mainly seems to be inspired by the engagement of other YPFDJ members (statements of conference attendees, see Dehai 2009; Meadna n.d.). Similar statements also emerged during interviews and conversations. Nevertheless, various study participants perceived that the conferences sometimes do not encourage participants to critically reflect upon the presented matters.

> 'They call it a conference. They talk and continuously repeat themselves and constantly say the same thing. Sometimes I even feel this is some kind of indoctrination that does not get anyone any further. They just say what they have to say… And then they perform a short theatre or some celebration or so. In fact, this is not really necessary. We are there due to politics. We rather should discuss political matters and speak out our opinions instead of watching theatre plays and cheering "*Awet N'Hafash*" ["Victory to the Masses"; slogan of the liberation movement].' (Dawit, Interview 2014)

In Dawit's opinion, the conference teaches the young diaspora Eritreans one particular narrative rather than actively involve the diaspora youth in the discussion and allowing them to help shape the political process and progress. Alike, different study participants told that critical and challenging questions to the speakers often

remained unaddressed. To them, this gave the impression that the YPFDJ conferences do not really intend to encourage discussions but rather to convey a certain narrative.

> Especially when talking about a conference [that took place around 2010] everybody [of the discussing second-generation Eritreans] got enthusiastic. Back then, they were discussing a lot during the conference, they said. They also were working productively in the workshops and not just have consumed, as it is rather the case today. Further, they pointed out that the conference was full with young diaspora Eritreans. However, in their opinion, the conferences then became worse and the quality would have decreased. Today, they just would tell you how it is and teach the youth the Eritrean history and everything associated with it. Compared with the earlier conferences, the conference today to their view rather instils ideologies than promotes discussions. (Own notes from group discussion, 2014)

If the YPFDJ conferences indeed have developed in such a way or if this view depends on other factors such as, for example, they getting older or having other expectations due to previous conference experiences, cannot be answered. However, it illustrates that they perceive the conferences no longer as a place of critical discussions but rather of promoting the predominant ideology aiming to integrate the diaspora youth in the nation-building process with little scope for playing an active role in its design and orientation.

In conclusion, young diaspora Eritreans who know YPFDJ conferences from own experiences, on the one hand enjoy the conferences because they enable the engagement and interaction with Eritrea, provide a chance to contribute to Eritrea's development and, most importantly, they present an opportunity to meet other diaspora Eritrean peers and friends. On the other hand, several study participants criticized that the conferences leave little room for critical discussions but rather transmit the ideologies of the former generation. These second-generation Eritreans then in fact rather feel limited in the possibility to form the political discussions and developments of Eritrea. However, irrespective the level of satisfaction, both the more content and the rather critical statements highlight the transmission of Eritrean values based on the legacy of the struggle for independency, respectively the generational transmission of the decisive Eritrean past, in order to promote and maintain Eritrean identity amongst the diaspora youth.

5 Conclusion

This paper discusses the process of reproducing and maintaining boundaries of belonging to Eritrea with a focus on the transmission of the Eritrean decisive past as a strategy to promote identity and a sense of belonging to the post-migrant generation. Bringing together the concepts of politics of belonging and the "chosen trauma" therefore presented a useful approach. The conceptual frame takes into account both unconscious processes and consciously promoted projects of politics of belonging. In doing so, it provides an appropriate analytical tool to shine light on possible strategies of promoting and passing on collective identity from one generation to the next.

For Eritreans born and/or raised in the diaspora the maintenance of their relations to Eritrea and their Eritrean identity in general is an issue. In this respect, the generational transmission of the decisive Eritrean past presents an important means. This paper illustrated two different modes, through which narratives and knowledge about this decisive Eritrean history are transmitted: within the family circle from parents to children or through the YPFDJ's annual international conferences. It reveals that the conveyance of the Eritrean decisive history to second-generation Eritreans helps to ensure the maintenance of Eritrean values and ideologies based on the legacy of the struggle for independency and to reproduce and preserve the Eritrean national identity correspondingly. Within families this seems to be a rather unconscious process, although some parents deliberately put effort into it. However, the YPFDJ conferences seem to constitute a means of purposefully passing on the Eritrean decisive past to the diaspora youth. Furthermore, by emphasizing the continuance of the threat situation, the conferences both guarantee the maintenance of Eritrea's "chosen trauma" and reinforce the articulation of a common identity and a sense of belonging. It is important to note that the paper hereby addresses one particular aspect or activity of the YPFDJ, the annual international conferences, and does not refer to the YPFDJ and its objectives in its entirety. Yet, to infer that the YPFDJ in general simply aims to transmit Eritrean identity based on its principles without seeking the dialogue with the diaspora youth probably falls to short. However, the fact that it was hardly possible to motivate active members of the YPFDJ to participate in this study leads to the situation that a corrective perspective is missing in this paper. Thus, for instance the actual possibility of second-generation Eritreans to engage also actively and critical in the YPFDJ conferences respectively

whether, how and to what extent the diaspora youth may take an active and contributory part in the nation-building process remains an open issue.

To sum up, the cross-generational transmission of the Eritrean "chosen trauma" and promoting and maintaining narratives about the country's decisive past may be understood in the sense of politics of belonging as a political project (see Yuval-Davis 2006) to reconfirm and promote national identity and a sense of belonging. Yet, the actual impacts of the transmission of the decisive Eritrean past on the second-generation Eritreans' identity and their everyday lives remains unclear since the effects of this transmission vary individually. However, the study demonstrates that second-generation Eritreans take over narratives of the former generation to some extent. This can be considered as an indication for the cross-generational transmission and maintenance of the Eritrean "chosen trauma" influencing, in whatever form, second-generation Eritreans' national identity. Besides, the circumstance that many second-generation Eritreans seem to go to YPFDJ conferences primarily to meet others of their kind furthermore indicates that the conference is not just about *Eritrean* belonging but also serves to develop and experience a *diaspora Eritrean* belonging. Thus, I argue that the YPFDJ conferences not only provide 'an alternative space of belonging' (Tecle 2012, 68) but also a space of alternative belonging.

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